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ABSTRACT

This book explores the lives of a group of adult students, their rationale for pursuing an independent study degree at a distance, and their perceptions of computer conferencing. It is based on data from unstructured interviews and participant observation that were then analyzed from a symbolic interaction perspective. Chapter 1 describes the following: the emergence of nontraditional higher education, using Hawks College as an example; distance education; and the emergence of distance courses that rely on computer conferencing for instructional delivery. Chapter 2 presents a typology of distance students, describes the sample students, and presents related scholarship about distance students. Chapter 3 explores student perspectives of the "online seminar" from these angles: the context, the pedagogical structure of the computer conference, and the nature of computer conference learning. Chapter 4 describes general learning strategies students use in distance education as well as some online learning strategies. Chapter 5 examines students' views about the dynamics and polarities involved in the conference and how computer conferencing facilitates the expression and examination of these; it also reports the social relations that form in this environment. Chapter 6 examines the implications that computer network experiences have for the future. Chapter 7 presents a model for computer conference learning. Appendixes include a description of the research methodology, 144 references, and author and subject indexes. (YLB)

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